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Exploration of Some Aspects of Society Through Painting

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May 30, 1967

Mr. Frederick R. Meyer

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Statement of the Thesis Proposal

Purpose of the Thesis: is to explore through the painting media some aspects of man in a fast moving rapidly changing environment, the environment which our present day society provides.

I

The environment prevalent in America today is an ever-changing sequence. We are existing in an age where it is assumed that change (progress?) will occur. In the greater part of history man could assume there would be no drastic fundamental change within his life span. With the possible exception of political change, most social and economic factors remained constant. As Charles Peguy stated in 1913,

"The world has changed less since the time of Jesus Christ, than it has in the last thirty years."¹

If we were to go back to 1913 now we would consider the era rather primitive indeed.

The industrial revolution has had profound effects upon man. The rapid development of technology in this century can be compared to a boulder rolling down a mountain; it is constantly gaining momentum, it may soon be, or perhaps already is out of control. One rotation leads to another and still another, with an increase in velocity being obtained with each successive

II

roll. Technology has developed in much the same manner. The crystal set preceded the radio, the radio preceded television, and television precedes a device capable of incorporating the sensations of taste, smell, and touch, as well as the audio-visual. One development leads to another.

Since my birth in 1943, there have been many significant examples of technological advancement. We have new medicines and medical equipment saving millions of lives which, heretofore, would have been lost. We have bombs which have the potential of incinerating us all at any given moment. Communication since 1943 has achieved a much greater sophistication . For example, one can receive a phone call from Europe via a satellite in space. This in turn is related to the fantastic changes in transportation, for we will soon not only be able to transport man-made objects into space, but also send and return men to and from the moon as well. It is all so wonderfully incredulously incredible, isn't it ?

III

For the moment perhaps, perhaps not. Haven't we already lost sight of who is controlling these factions. Who does and who will apply the science, of applied science which makes our rolling-boulder-down-a-mountain-side technology.

Who determines to what ends technology should be applied?

Who cares to what ends technology is applied?

Who can do anything about how technology is applied?

The people? Has the average teenager watched 15,000 hours of television by the time he is 18 years old because he wants to, or because the television industry wants him to? Could it be he is controlled by television? I feel he is. Is he greatly influenced by mass government, mass merchandising as well as mass communication? Everything seems to be becoming mass oriented. This is achieved primarily through the wonders of technology.

Perhaps I should clarify the fact that I have no quarrel with technological development.

What concerns me is who controls its develop-

ment, and to what end it services. I feel that conditions are such that mismanaged applied science can all too easily be rationalized as being progress. It is this mismanagement that is a very real threat to man. The result could be calamitous. As Norman Mailer so picturesquely stated "there's a shit storm coming."

I do not profess being able to foresee the future, nor will I endeavor to postulate what a "shit storm" would actually be like. I simply feel our society is moving too fast, for uncertain motives. I hope time will prove me 100% wrong, but I feel we may be racing toward impending doom.

My paintings are a reaction to this feeling of impending doom, yet they are not totally without optimism.

I feel much the same as Allen Leepa, Professor of Art at Michigan State University, that..

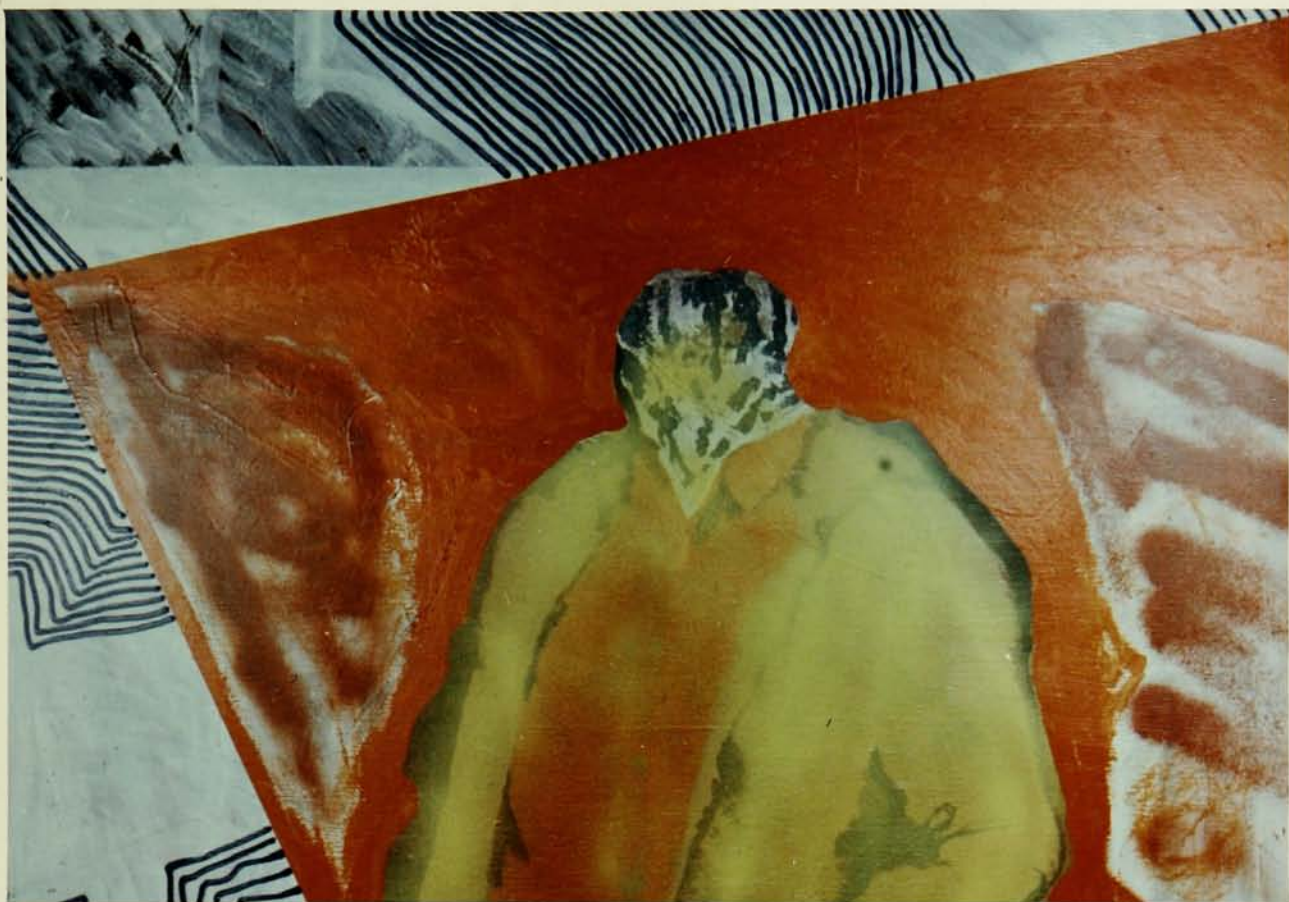
"...a visual work of art cannot be translated into words. The assumption that it can, as when someone asks

that a painting be explained to him, attests to Western man's over-reliance on rational thought as the primary, if not only way to understand the world. Art is a metaphorical statement that is defined by those meanings and human equivalents which man feels most directly, truthfully, and comprehensively represent him at any particular time. "2

In my paintings I am metaphorically dealing with the potential "shit storm".

VI

I started the thesis by developing an image of man. I used this image in two paintings, and had contemplated the possible use of it throughout the series as a way of depicting the de-personalization of man; one man is all men. I abandoned this approach shortly, feeling it was too obvious and too literal an approach.





VII

During the same period I had started a self-portrait which was giving me much difficulty. I ignored this painting for several weeks until I returned to it and worked it into its present state. I feel it has a mysterious air I appreciate which the first two paintings lacked.

These first three paintings were all done on stretched canvas. In the third painting I combined photographs and spray paint, instead of the acrylics used in the first two paintings.



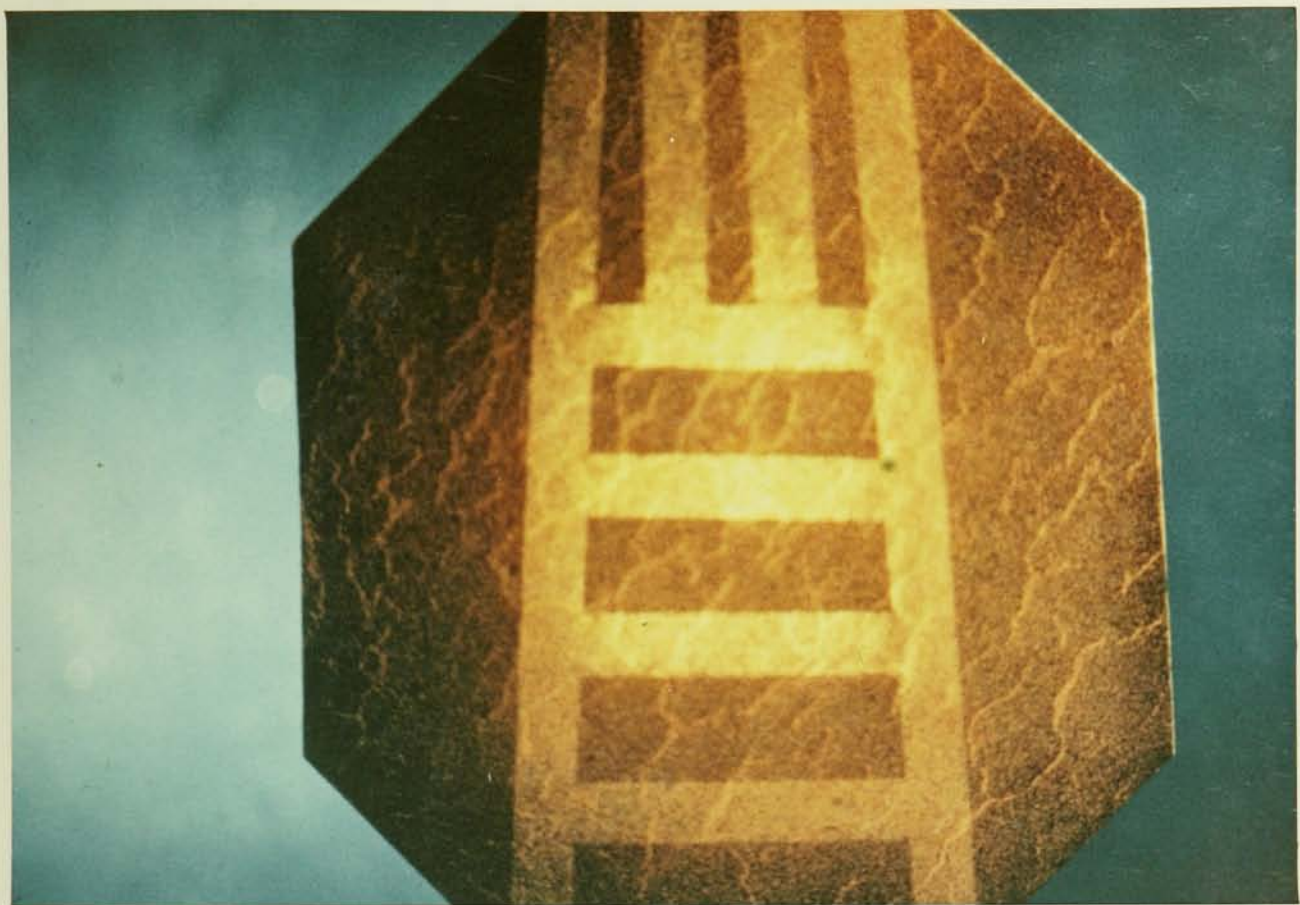
VIII

After deciding the first two paintings were inadequate, and abandoning the self-portrait for a time, I stretched three canvases approximately 12"x15". While I am not particularly happy with the finished products, these paintings helped develop a temperament of color which later affected the self-portrait and would be prominent throughout the entire thesis. The colors were subtle and unassuming, almost mundane. The texture in the painting on the left was achieved by adhering styrofoam dust to the canvas and overpainting with acrylics.



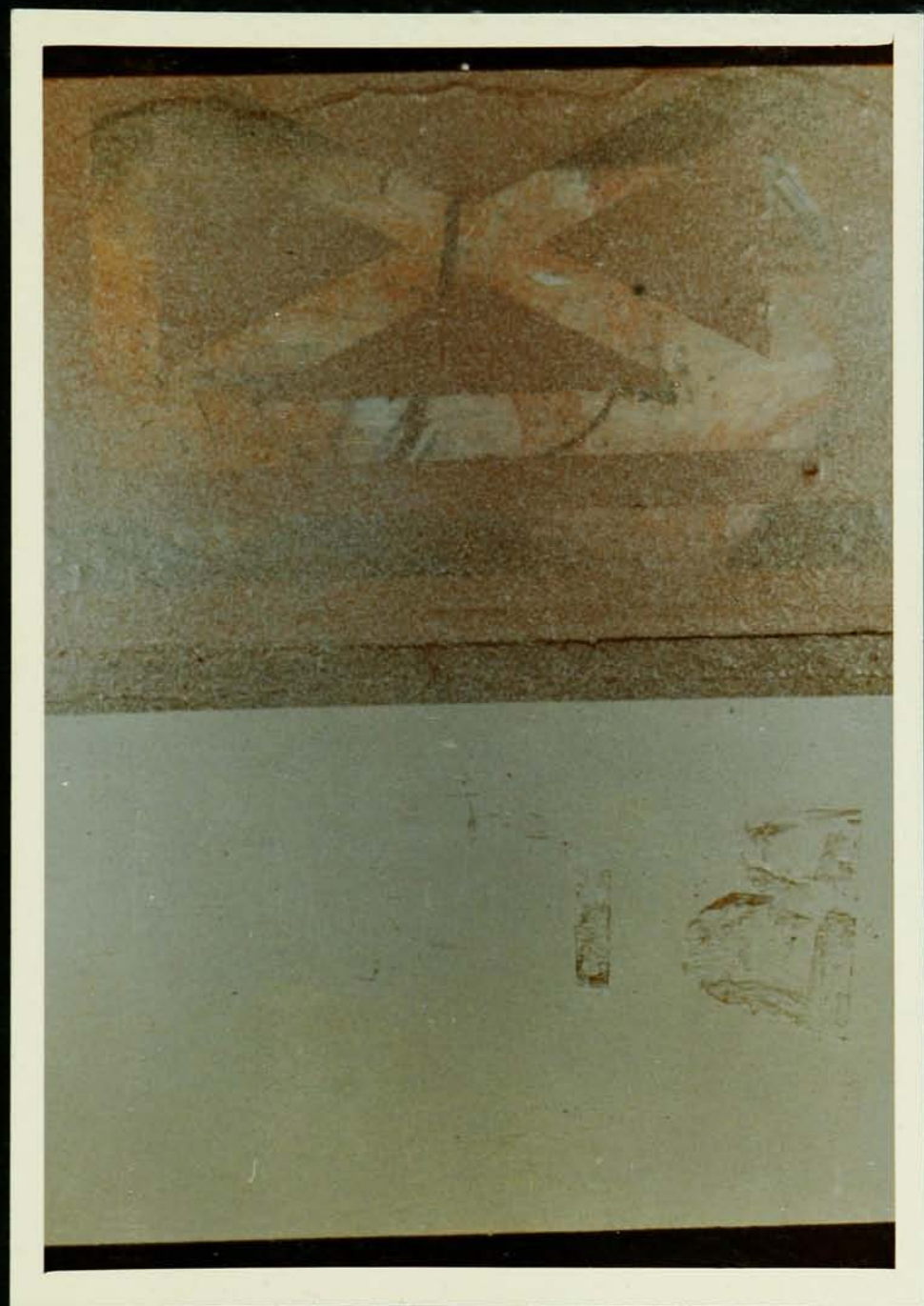
IX

I began to question the value of dealing with such a contemporary theme, using such materials as canvas which painters have been employing for hundreds of years. I decided to explore materials which might be more reflective of our time, and future time. The painting shown here is spray paint on rippled plastic. The positive luminous shape is in reality a negative shape, for everything on the reverse side was sprayed but the luminous area. The ambiguity of relationship is interesting.



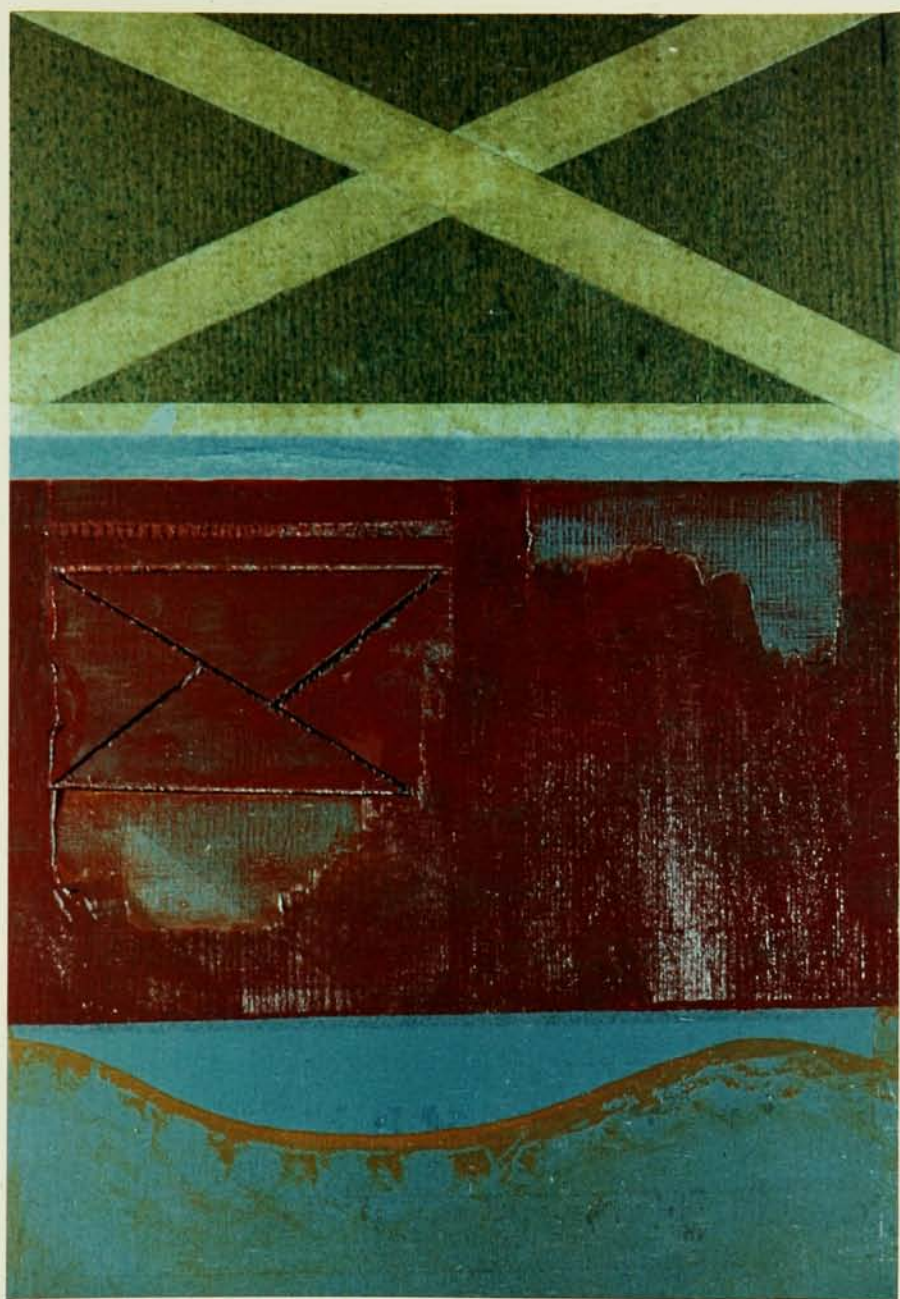
The painting shown here is small, approximately 8"x12", but quite powerful. It is painted on plywood, incorporating acrylics, dry linseed oil, gouging, and spray paint. It has both a beauty and an ugliness working together. A feeling that perhaps "all that glitters is not gold."

1



XI

The next painting, on wood, was also 8"x12". Like the painting on the preceding page, it is broken into divisions. A certain tension develops among the three divisions, yet it retains a feeling of unity. The media was primarily acrylics, in this case.



XII

In this painting I carried the division of primary areas one step further. The gray area on top is wood which rests on top of the canvas at an angle. It is a completely separate entity, yet very much a part of the total.



XIII

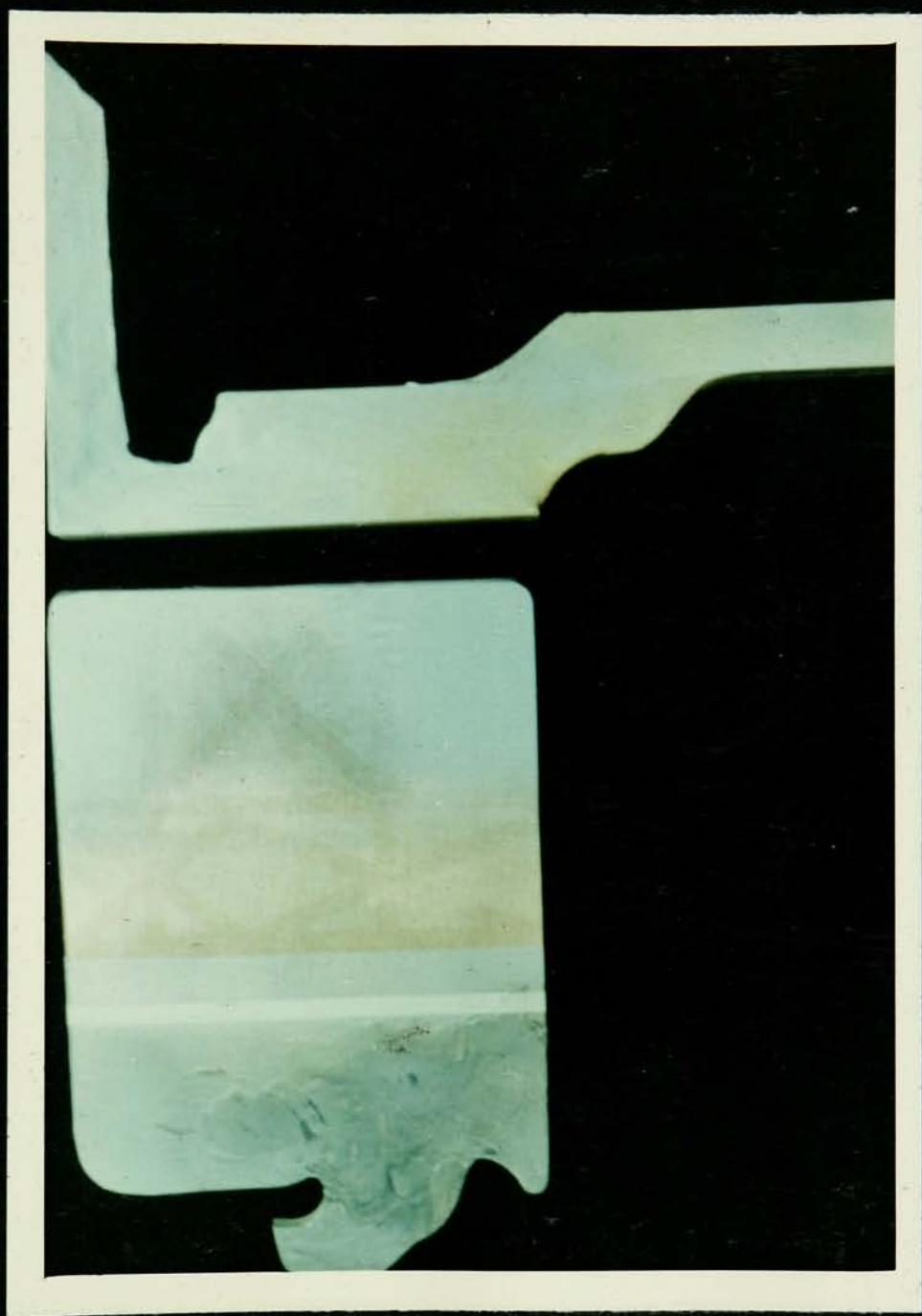
Three separate 12"x15" canvases are combined to form a total image in the paintings here. I find it a simple shape, yet complex within. Again the colors are muted and subtle. The media is a combination of brushed-on acrylics and spray paint.



I found as I worked on my thesis that the form of the work became increasingly significant, an appropriate metaphor. This work, closer to sculpture than painting, combines unique form as well as media, such as painted plaster over wood, plastic, and nails.



What intrigues me in this work is that both forms are very different in shape, scale and media, yet it is difficult to say one dominates the other. The media in the form above is painted plaster on wood. In the form below, plywood, spray paint, and Bio-Plastic are utilized. Bio-Plastic is a trade name for a liquid plastic which dries hard after being applied. In this work it is used to create the textured area in the bottom right of the lower form.



This work incorporates a division of forms again. Cold, almost brutal, I feel that it is one of the outstanding works of the group. Media is Bio-Plastic, gray-painted wood, and automobile putty. was contrasted by plaster over wood.



XVII

Once again form plays a major role in this work.
A certain tension is achieved. Media is body
putty on spray-painted plywood and spray-
painted plywood.



XVIII

This painting is very small, approximately 4"x8".
The letters SS are encased in Bio-Plastic. The
greenish area is body putty. The work has, I feel,
a frightening aura to it.



The form on the left is Bio-Plastic poured in four individual layers. After each layer hardened I painted in certain areas. After all four layers are hardened the result is an ambiguous shifting of patterns through the transparent planes. The form on the right is composed of two layers of Bio-Plastic on plywood.



I feel the seventeen works shown should be viewed as a total body of work. While individually some are strong works many are not. I was not, however, trying to produce seventeen successful works, but come closer to a metaphorical reaction to the "shit storm" which I feel threatens us. I feel a series of paintings should be constructed piece by piece; the total series is a process of creation, not merely a grouping of individual works. A good series must invariably have some bad paintings.

I feel that in painting one should not consider anything too precious to violate. Violate anything and everything, as a means to expand your knowledge, the work in the long run will not suffer.

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Footnotes

1. Calvin Tompkins, THE WORLD OF MARCEL DUCHAMP. p.7.
2. Gregory Battcock, ed. THE NEW ART. p. 138.